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Glue Gun Engraved Tombstones

Posted by: darkpenguincowboy

After reading Terra and many other people's tuts on tombstones, I decided it was high time that I gave my old tombstones a much needed facelift.

Unfortunately, I don't own a Dremel, and i wouldn't really find many other uses for it in my day to day life other than this project, so i thought hard for an alternate solution. Then it hit me, use a glue gun!

Now, i understand that a glue gun probably wouldn't be the first thing to pop into many people's minds, but trust me, when you are a high school student bored with making mag-lev cars and balloon racers in tech class, you, umm....."discover" things, like how a hot glue gun melts and cauterizes foam boards with enough precision to shape letters and other things.

Nevertheless, I am by no means saying you should run out and buy a top of the line glue gun, only to use it for this, or even ruin an existing glue gun. Dollar store or bargain bin glue guns work just the same as high performance ones, as you will only be using the tip (the heated part) and not the actual glue itself. While we are on the subject, I don't recommend using a low temperature glue gun either, for obvious reasons.

Finally, I **HIGHLY** recommend you read Terra's tut Ancient Tombstones, because i really don't feel comfortable taking credit for most of this tut, when a great deal of it was already explained by Terra so eloquently before.

So, now that that is all out of the way, i think it is high time we get this tutorial started! Here is a pic of just how bad our tombstones were before. Flat gray textured paint on particle board, cut out and painted with white writing. yeah, it was that bad

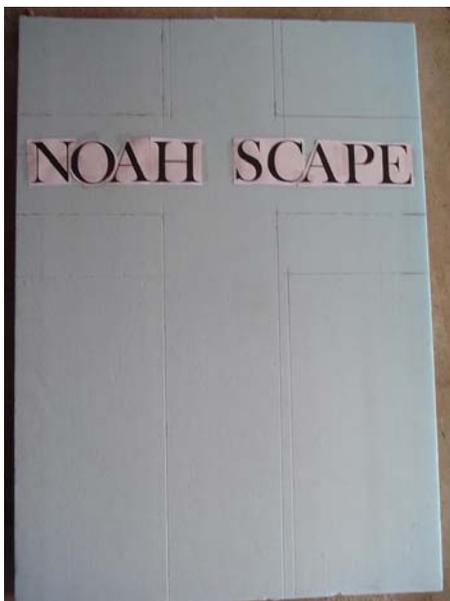


Basically, you want to brainstorm first, just what do you want your stone to look like? What shape do you want it to be? what do you want to really stand out? Do you want it to look old, or new? Will it be humorous, or serious?

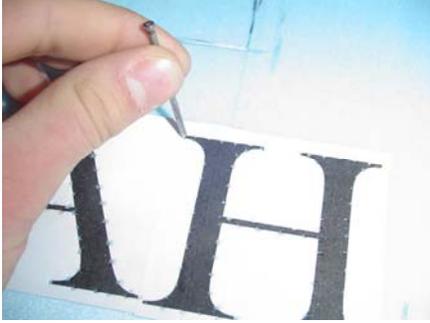
Once you have got a basic sketch, take your foam board and draw out a basic outline for the stone. In this example, I used a cross, but yours could be a rectangle, rounded rectangle, or any shape you want it to be.

Make sure that the foam is at least an inch and a half thick, I used two, but anything thinner, and the hot glue gun may melt all the way through.

Go to word and type out the message you want, in the font you want. I found it very helpful to turn the page to "landscape", which flips it horizontally. Find the right size you want, and print it out. I discovered afterwards that it may be helpful to switch the style to "emboss", which will give you just the outline of the letters.



Using your sketch as a guide, position the letters on the stone and tape them into place with a bit of clear tape.



The next step will be to use a small, sharp nail or knife to puncture small holes along the outlines of all the letters. Don't be afraid to push hard to really transfer the hole through. The sharper the object, the easier this is, just be careful. This is by far the slowest part of the entire process, depending on how many letters you have, this could take anywhere from five minutes to half an hour.

If you haven't already, plug in your glue gun. Make sure that the gun had no glue sticks in it, as this may accidentally leak out during the shaping, and cause damage to your stone. It will take at least a few minutes to warm up, so I suggest plugging it in a little over half way through the hole puncturing. Once it is hot enough, I really recommend you practice on a scrap piece of foam at first. Practice making smooth, straight lines, gradually getting deeper towards the center, and then gradually coming back up to the top. Once you are comfortable with this, practice making the same valley-like motions in a curve, getting deeper and wider in the middle of the curve, then popping back up easily towards the end.



After you are completely comfortable with this, you may notice a few things.

1. What is that weird, sweet smell and smoke coming from the end of the glue gun?
2. There is a build up of melted foam on the end of the gun, can I do anything to clean it?
3. Is this going to do any permanent damage to my lungs?

To answer numbers one and three, the smell is vaporizing foam, the smoke is vaporized foam, and yeah, you should probably be wearing a mask, but as long as you aren't sitting there in a sealed box, inhaling the vapors like there is no tomorrow, I doubt you will be doing any serious damage. My advice is to just work in an open space, like a garage, and if you really are bothered by the smell (which really isn't that bad) put up a small fan to blow the fumes away.

To detail the letters, you will need to follow a basic pattern. the thinner the line, the shallower the melt.



Try to start out with a shallow area, like the top of an S. Don't be afraid if you go outside the lines, you can always go back and correct. Just be sure to only correct slightly, or else you will end up with giant letters.

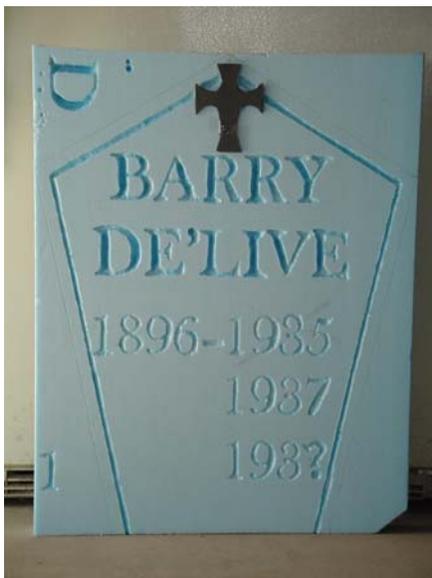
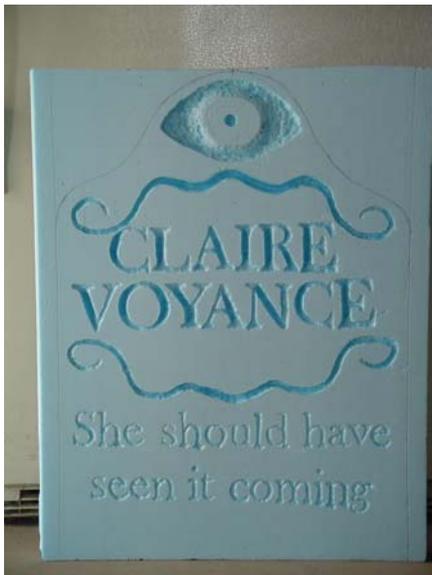
You will want to transition smoothly from areas of shallower depth to areas of deeper and wider topography, but don't worry, you can always go back through and smooth out rough edges. Be patient, it takes practice and time to get steady (heck, even I am not there yet!



Alright, here are a series of pics of the depth of an "S" curve. The pencil helps to show just how the curve gets deeper towards the center of the curve, and shallower as it heads to the ends.



Obtained from
Omarshauntedtrail.com



Here are some of the pics of the final designs of the tombstones I have done so far. I won't be able to access the foam cutter until Tuesday, so for now this is as far as I can go with the tut, but I promise more pictures to come, as soon as I get these babies cut out.

I was thinking possibly LEDs for the eye? what do you think?

The three dates are for when he was first buried, and then subsequently dug up and buried once more. for some reason I have had to explain that to like five people. In the final one, the first two will be crossed out